

Testimony for SB284: “AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS”

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Mary Elizabeth Smith and I am from New Haven, CT. I am also part of Make the Road CT. I stand in support of SB284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 18 regardless of immigration status is an important step in making sure our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we all need and deserve. But our work doesn't end with expanding access up to age 18; we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to all immigrants of any age, including parents and adults.

Make the Road CT is an intergenerational member-led community-based organization working to build power in immigrant, Latinx, and working-class communities in Connecticut. We have offices in Bridgeport and Hartford and have more than 1,000 members, the majority of whom are a part of undocumented and mixed status immigrant families. According to a survey we did of our members in 2020, nearly 75% of those surveyed stated they did not have any health insurance. This lack of access to insurance leads to negative consequences for immigrant families but also for society as a whole. Immigrant families often do not seek medical care for routine check-ups or preventative care, out of fear of high medical bills. In addition, other more significant illnesses often go untreated or are dealt with using home remedies. One of our survey respondents stated, “[The pandemic] has affected us psychologically and we have gotten sick but [...] we have been afraid to go to the hospital due to the bills we have on top of us”.

At Make the Road we have seen day in and day out how the pandemic has affected our communities financially, socially and psychologically but also in terms of their health and wellbeing. Our immigrant and undocumented communities are first responders and essential workers in many of our cities, but when their children get sick they are not taking them to the hospital for fear of staggering bills. If we want Connecticut to recover from COVID-19, we must work toward ensuring that undocumented immigrants of all ages can access health care. Leaving undocumented parents and adults behind means leaving a large portion of essential workers on the frontlines of the pandemic behind.

The children and adults in our State deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Last year the state of Connecticut expanded access to HUSKY to children ages 0-8 years. Passage of SB284 this year would ensure that children will not age out of coverage once they turn 9 years old and be left without healthcare. But our work does not end with expanding access up to age 18. We

need to ensure that all immigrants, including parents and adults, are able to have access to HUSKY and the healthcare they need. The state of Connecticut must create a long term plan to expand HUSKY access to our whole immigrant community.

I support S.B. 284 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all immigrants regardless of age.

Thank you for your time,

Mary Elizabeth Smith

Make the Road CT